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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003092

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TAGS: ASEC CASC PGOV PHUM PREL BL

SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: SUCRE, WITHOUT ANY POLICE, ON THE EDGE

REF: A. LA PAZ 3077

1B. LA PAZ 3078

Classified By: EcoPol chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary
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11. (C) Sucre returned to relative calm on November 26 after three days of turmoil, which left at least three dead, 200 people hospitalized and many public buildings (mostly police and prefecture) looted and burned. There are no reports of U.S. citizens among the injured. Police forces have fled Sucre, so the city government has instituted its own citizen security plan. President Evo Morales, his government, and members of his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party continue to reject all responsibility for the violence. This despite the fact that the MAS' unilateral action to move the Constituent Assembly to a military facility outside of Sucre -- locking out the opposition in the process -- was the spark that ignited the three-day conflict (refs A and B). The MAS has yet to reveal the contents of the constitution it approved on November 24, settling for a one page advertisement in newspapers, which included few details. Press reports indicate that among the provisions are the elimination of the (currently) opposition-controlled Senate and the indefinite re-election of the President.

12. (C) The international community (Spain, Brazil, the European Union, and the United Nations) has started voicing its concern, albeit timidly, over the Morales government's actions in Sucre. Six departments have scheduled protests and general strikes to oppose the MAS constitution for November 28, and opposition stronghold Santa Cruz department as usual is leading the way. Santa Cruz civic leaders have told emboffs they will call for a referendum on their autonomy plans within weeks if the MAS does not rescind its "illegal" constitution. Meanwhile, President Morales' actions on November 26 -- participating in a protest march

against the Senate and continued comments against the opposition -- provide little indication that he is interested in healing the nation following the tragic events of November 23-25. End Summary

Sucre Situation Update: 5:00 PM November 26

¶3. (SBU) By late morning November 26, Sucre was calm but very tense. Contacts told emboff that the city had no police force whatsoever, stating the Sucre was "totally independent." The Chuquisaca prefecture building is closed, with no one apparently at work. The city government is open, but is focused on cleaning up the city. Most businesses were open with the exception of banks that rely on the police for security. Most of Sucre's "disappeared" youth have apparently returned home. Only some university students from the countryside are unaccounted for. However, these students may simply have returned to their villages without notifying their respective landlords.

¶4. (U) In light of the deteriorating situation in Sucre, the Consular Section issued a warden message on November 25 advising U.S. citizens to avoid the city and urging those U.S. citizens already in Sucre to exercise extreme caution, stay inside and away from any demonstrations, and to monitor local media closely. There are approximately one hundred U.S. citizens (not including Peace Corps volunteers) registered with the Embassy who reside in Chuquisaca department, the majority of who live in Sucre. According to the Consular Section Sucre warden, there were no reports of U.S. citizens injured in the violence, or lacking basic necessities (food, water and fuel). There remain seven Peace Corps volunteers in Sucre city, five of which are staying in their respective homes, two in a hotel. Peace Corps has made arrangements to evacuate them from Sucre November 27.

Police Flees Sucre, Stations Looted, Prisoners Escape

¶5. (SBU) The chief of the National Police General Miguel Vasquez ordered police officers to leave Sucre around midday November 25. Vasquez reasoned that looting and burning of police facilities, the beatings of several officers which culminated in the lynching death Jhimmie Quispe (later the report was ruled false) made it impossible for the police to ensure security in Sucre and for themselves. Vasquez stated, "At this moment I am ordering the retreat of the police. While I am commander, the police will not return to Sucre." The police began leaving Sucre for Potosi around 1:00 PM. Evening TV broadcasts on November 25 showed people looting police facilities, burning police vehicles, and assaulting cops.

¶6. (C) In response to the security vacuum in Sucre, members of various civic groups and the Sucre municipal government have put in place a "Citizen Security Plan." According to a Sucre embassy contact who is a member of the Inter-Institutional Committee, the city government has set-up a toll-free hotline in which residents can call if they notice criminal activity. Once a call is received, the city government then dispatches private security companies and "neighborhood protection brigades." According to press reports, Fidel Herrera, the President of the Sucre City Council and a vocal critic of the Morales administration's actions in Sucre, has asked that the military come to Sucre to maintain order in the police's absence.

¶7. (SBU) The loss of police control resulted in a massive prison break on November 25. Some 70 plus prisoners (some considered quite dangerous) apparently fled the San Roque prison located within Sucre city limits. Approximately 30 prisoners chose to stay in the prison. According to news reports, prison director Deisy Aquilar announced that some 30

of the escapees returned to the prison later in the day.

According to a Sucre contact, prison offices were burned leaving prison officials having to work and live out of prison cells. There is some concern amongst Sucre's residents that "dangerous criminals" are free and roaming the streets, without any chance of capture due to the lack of police.

More Injured and Three Dead

¶ 8. (SBU) Juan Carlos Serrudo Murillo, a 25 year-old student and carpenter, is the third confirmed death from the violence. Sucre's Santa Barbara hospital has stated that Serrudo died from a chest wound sustained from a tear gas grenade. According to news sources at least two people are in comas and two hundred people have been hospitalized. Thirty of those in the hospital are said to be police officers.

Government to Opposition) You Are To Blame

¶ 9. (SBU) Evo's November 25 speech to the nation -- well into the third day of the conflict, rather than express condolences to the families of the deceased)- focused on his familiar rhetoric that the "oligarchs and rightists" are responsible for the country's problems including the violence in Sucre. Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera in a November 25 TV interview claimed that government is in a "war to the death" and outlined how the opposition plans to "overthrow" Evo's administration. Government officials have rejected any responsibility for the death of Gonzalo Duran and others. (Note: For a full breakout of the government's response see septel. End Note).

Prefect's Home Ransacked

¶ 10. (SBU) Chuquisaca Prefect David Sanchez, who briefly resigned earlier this year, is likely wishing he had never returned to work. Although, never a MAS-party hard-liner, his weak defense of Sucre's demand for full-capital status turned him into a target for pro-Sucre (anti-MAS) radicals. Sanchez has gone into hiding since his last sighting on November 24 at the MAS-only Constituent Assembly meeting at La Glorieta. Members of the Chuquisaca Inter-Institutional Committee have called for the prefect's resignation. Looters were filmed ransacking and burning his home.

Rumors of La Paz City Government Complicity

¶ 11. (C) Sources within the La Paz city government have told emboffs that La Paz mayor Juan del Granado used city funds to pay for the transport of pro-MAS (and pro-La Paz) protesters to the La Glorieta military base, where the MAS Constituent Assembly delegates approved their constitution. Del Granado is considered a very effective mayor and has understandably been an outspoken advocate for maintaining the executive and legislative branches in La Paz. Although he is not a member of Morales' MAS party, he does lead the Movimiento Sin Miedo (MSM) party which is closely allied with the MAS.

More Attacks On The Media

¶ 12. (SBU) Embassy contacts in Sucre told emboffs that press outlets were broadcasting on November 26; however, there are mounting reports of attacks on the media during the November 23-25 events (in addition to those covered in ref B). Reporters from Agence France Presse (AFP) and the private Bolivian network PAT claimed to have been beaten by police. Aizar Raldes from AFP stated, "It was a mob of police

officers that attacked us. They beat us. We were five photographers, four local and one from the foreign press." At a different time, reporters from four different Bolivian media outlets (newspapers La Razon and El Deber, and TV networks ATB and Red Uno) state they were called to attend a police press conference; once at the "conference" they allege officers beat and hurled rocks at them.

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International Response
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¶13. (SBU) The Spanish were the first to come out publicly on the Sucre violence. According to the Spanish news agency EFE which quoted Spain's Ambassador to Bolivia, the Secretary for Iberian-American Affairs, Trinidad Jiminez spoke to Minister Juan Ramon Quintana on November 24 before the Sucre violence claimed its first victim. EFE also reported that Spanish Foreign Minister Bernardino Leon told the Morales government that Spain viewed the "situation in Sucre as grave."

¶14. (C) The Ambassador spoke with Brazil's Ambassador to Bolivia November 26. The Brazilians are apparently extremely concerned by what occurred in Sucre November 23-25.

¶15. (U) The European Union Presidency issued a statement late in the afternoon of November 26.

--- Begin Statement ---

EU Presidency statement on the current situation in Bolivia

The EU Presidency regrets the weekend's tragic events in Sucre and, expressing its condolences to the families of the victims, wishes that Bolivia can find a path of unity and consensus in the framework of the Constituent Assembly. At the same time, the EU trusts that the constituent process may proceed according to democratic principals and respect for legality and legitimacy.

--- End Statement ---

¶16. (C) An Embassy contact with the Swedish mission to La Paz told emboff early November 26, that the EU was considering recommending to the Bolivian government that it call in a high-level international mediator. If initial comments by Presidency Minister Quintana are any indication, the Bolivian government is not prepared to accept international intervention. On November 26, Quintana responding to a question whether or not the government would accept the opposition's suggestion of an Organization of American States (OAS) mission to Bolivia to investigate the events in Sucre told a radio audience that "the government, under no concept or pretext, will accept that the OAS conduct an investigation of the events that occurred in Sucre because here in Bolivia there exists a democratic government legitimately constituted (elected)."

¶17. (C) The Canadian Embassy, based in Lima, contacted us and said that Ottawa too is considering issuing a statement of concern or possibly raising Bolivia's situation in the OAS.

¶18. (U) The United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon also issued a statement late on November 26 expressing concern "about the violent confrontations that occurred in recent days."

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MAS' AD: Constitution for Dummies
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¶19. (SBU) The MAS delegates who attended the plenary session and passed the party's constitution "en grande" (general terms) have yet to reveal the actual text of the constitution. Newspapers across the country published a one page, ten point summary of the MAS constitution on November 26. Interestingly, the advertisement avoided all mention of

presidential re-election (which is certainly included in the constitution) and provided almost no details. According to the one page ad the MAS constitution establishes that:

- Unity of the Bolivian State is guaranteed.
- Bolivia is a plurinational communitarian state. Neither term is actually defined.
- A new economic model based on principals of complimentary-ness, reciprocity, solidarity, redistribution, equality, sustainability, balance, justice and transparency. The model recognizes various forms of ownership including state, community and private.
- Natural resources are a strategic national interest for the country's development that belong to the people but are administered by the state.
- Hydrocarbons nationalization is guaranteed, and that the state is responsible for the entire production chain.
- Access to health, education and sport (recreation) are amongst the peoples' fundamental rights.
- The structure and territorial organization of the state recognizes departmental autonomy, regional, municipal and indigenous autonomy.
- Democracy is strengthened by allowing for direct elections and second rounds of election in the event that no candidate obtains a majority. The people can revoke (get rid of) an elected official via popular vote.
- The fight against corruption will be strengthened via tougher investigation, prosecution and sanctioning of people who commit corruption. Anti-corruption measures will be retroactive.
- That the government will have its own Prosecutor General who defends the interests of the state, so that the state is no longer indefensible against international and national trials.

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Forecast: Protests, Protests, and more Protests
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¶20. (SBU) President Evo Morales led a protest march to the Bolivian Senate November 26 to "demand the approval of Plan Dignity" and Morales' larger legislative agenda. Plan Dignity would increase benefits to the elderly and reduce the eligibility age to 60 years. The Senate had hoped to defuse the march with passage of its own Plan Dignity Friday. Although far shy of organizers' estimates of 20,000, about 1,500 to 2,500 campesino (small farmers) supporters of President Morales participated. They demanded the plan be funded from departmental funds, many of whom they accused of being too powerful, corrupt, and opposed to Morales' agenda. Five departments had planned counter demonstrations this week to protest the proposed budget cuts, but the issue has been overtaken by the even more controversial passage of the La Glorieta constitution. Now, six of Bolivia's nine departments (Chuquisaca, Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija, and Cochabamba) have collectively planned large protests against the La Glorieta constitution in their capitals November 28. Santa Cruz and Sucre have been in somewhat constant state of protest since the November 24 "general" passage of the disputed constitution.

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Santa Cruz Leads the Opposition
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¶21. (C) Poloff met with Santa Cruz Civic Committee leader Branko Marinkovic to gauge Santa Cruz's response to the Sucre violence. Marinkovic explained that there would be a march

to the central plaza later on November 26 with at least 6,000 people expected to participate. Santa Cruz authorities have asked police and military to stay out of the way. The Municipal Guard (which is respected by Cruzenos) are the only ones out in the streets at the moment. The Parmasola jail will be guarded by the police, however, to ensure no break-out occurs. The Civic Committee is hoping to keep it peaceful but "undoubtedly some things will be broken," Marinkovic stated.

¶22. (C) During the demonstration Marinkovic stated that he would present the Carta autonomica - a document which establishes Santa Cruz's departmental constitution.

Marinkovic explained that he would outline a drawn out process whereby the Civic Committee would review the Carta before submitting it to a referendum. He expects this process to take several weeks. The opposition's strategy is to buy time in order to allow for the possibility or reinitiating a dialogue with the government. That said, the absolute demand of the opposition is that the government rescind its illegal constitution, only then can a dialogue resume. Even if talks resume, Marinkovic stressed that the opposition will not budge on re-election for the president. On November 28, Santa Cruz and other opposition departments (Beni, Pando and Tarija) have called for a general strike. Marinkovic stated he would lead a hunger strike starting November 29. Marinkovic also said he is planning to travel to Washington to brief the OAS on December 6.

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Comment
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¶23. (C) President Morales' speech to the nation on November 25 did nothing to reduce tensions. His government's complete abdication of responsibility -- and the withdrawal of all police forces from Sucre -- demonstrates that it is more concerned with perception (that no more deaths can be attributed to it) than seeing that order is restored.

Commenting on the government's withdrawal of police, Amnesty International released a statement noting that "in moments of crisis like these . . . elected authorities should demonstrate their ability to govern the country." Evo's participation in protest marches against the Senate one day following the tragic events in Sucre, shows that he is less concerned with healing his nation, and more interested in forcing through more of his "reforms." Evo's apparent disregard for the gravity of the situation does not bode well for the coming weeks. End Comment.

GOLDBERG